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Fort Wayne, The Summit City

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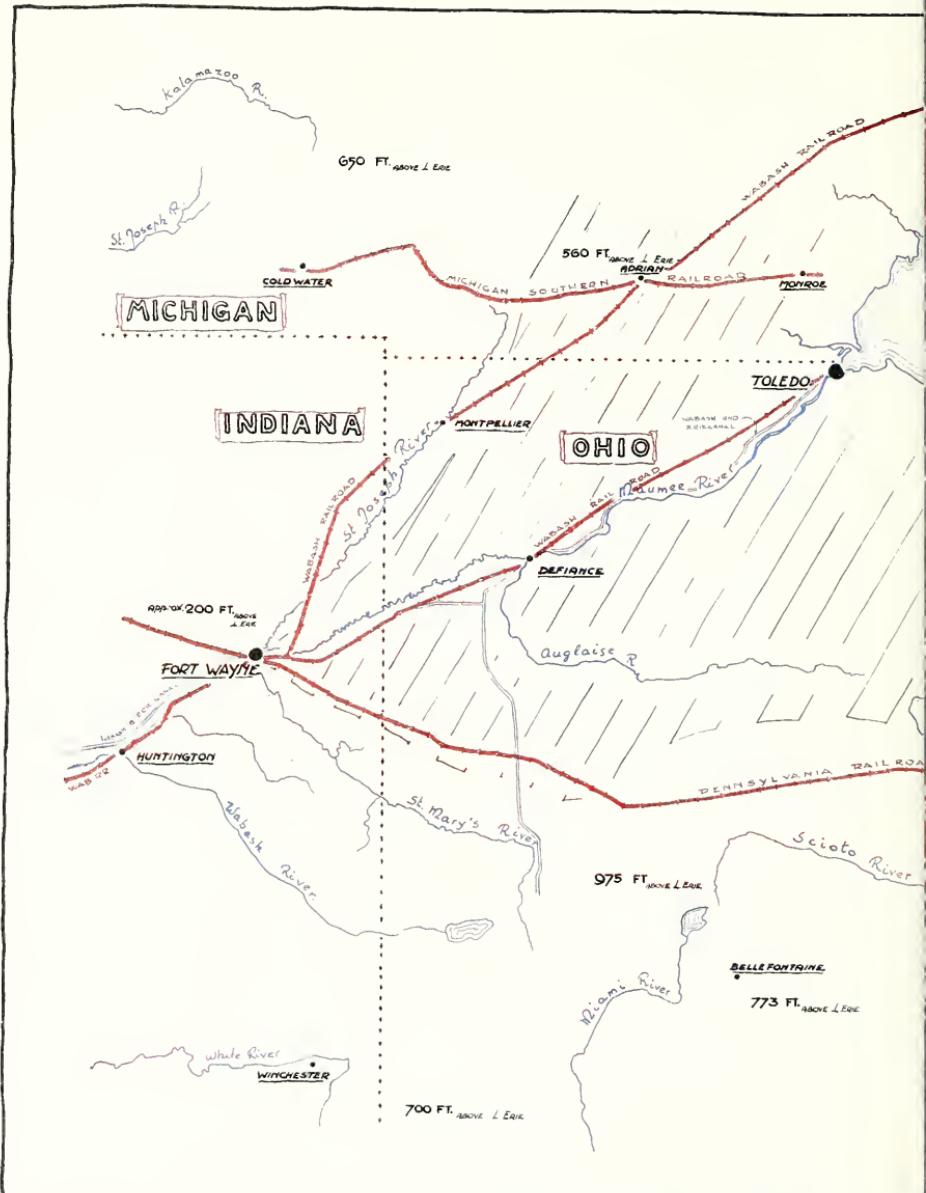
FOREWORD

Fort Wayne is frequently called the Summit City because of its location at the dividing point between the waters of the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. The name is correct only in a relative sense, however. Jesse L. Williams, for many years chief engineer of all canal routes and projected railroads in Indiana, points this out in the following letter. Writing at a time when the city fathers were encouraging railroads to join Fort Wayne's transportation network, he very carefully explains the advantages of the "low summit." The letter is reprinted as published, except for corrections in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

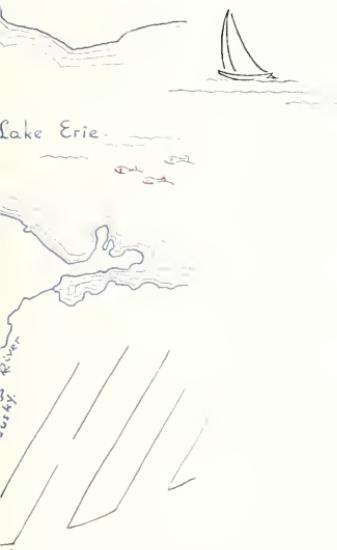
To the Editor of the GAZETTE:

The chief purpose of this communication is to reconcile discrepancies regarding the height of this city above Lake Erie. Some publications give the canal surface on this summit level as 815 feet above the sea and 252 feet above Lake Erie. The late geological report of Ohio places the Fort Wayne depot on the Pittsburgh road at 235 feet, while another geological document gives 204 feet as the height of the same locality above Lake Erie. These figures are from various railroad surveys. But the actual construction and use of a canal with long levels compel exactness not essential on railroads, and those figures are therefore more reliable. Referring to official reports of the Board of Public Works, made to the legislatures of Ohio and Indiana thirty years ago during the construction of the Wabash-Erie Canal, I find the lift of the several locks stated. Summing up the lockage and adding the descent in the long levels (which is very slight), I find the fall from the canal surface in Fort Wayne to the surface of Lake Erie, as it stood about the year 1842, to be 198 feet. . . .

Fort Wayne, though called the "Summit City," is a summit only in the direction of the Maumee and Wabash valleys. The cross section north and south shows that it is in a trough geologists call the Maumee Valley, a continuation of the "trough of Lake Erie." Northwardly, the surface rises rapidly. The Michigan Southern Railroad track, some 65 miles north, attains a height of 560 feet above Lake Erie and 360



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SCALE OF MILES

A scale bar with markings at 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, and 30 miles.

1909 W.

feet above Fort Wayne. A few miles farther north, at the head of the Little St. Joseph and the Kalamazoo rivers, the land is as much as 650 feet above Lake Erie; this is the highest point in the southern half of Michigan. Southwardly, the country ascends and reaches the highest land in Indiana (eight miles southeast of Winchester), which point is about 700 feet high, or 500 feet above Fort Wayne. This point is at the sources of the Whitewater, White, and Big Miami rivers.

This comparative view bears upon the question of cheap transportation. Elevation is not overcome without cost, especially with heavy freights. The great depression of the Fort Wayne summit, reached by the "trough of the Maumee," as it is called by the geologists, early led to its adoption for canal construction. Subsequently, two leading railroads sought and occupied this depression--the Pittsburgh and Chicago, and the Toledo and St. Louis. No other railroad between Richmond, Indiana, and the Saginaw Bay has found so low a passage over the watershed between the Ohio River and Lake Erie, or the divide between Lakes Erie and Michigan.

The Bellefontaine route ("Bee Line" so-called) crosses the summit in Logan County, Ohio, 773 feet above Lake Erie and 575 feet above Fort Wayne. In that vicinity, the source of the Big Miami and the Scioto rivers, the highest land in Ohio (975 feet above Lake Erie) is found. The Atlantic and Great Western track in Richland County rises 802 feet above Lake Erie and 604 feet above the trough or gap in which Fort Wayne is located. This point, the source of the Sandusky and the Muskingum rivers, is but 800 feet lower than the track on the summit of the Allegheny Mountains in the Altoona tunnel.

These relative altitudes possess an interest

also in the aspect of geological investigation. In the late Ohio geological report alluded to, a separate chapter is devoted to the Maumee Valley. Glacial action is credited for the peculiar formation of this valley, in connection with the basin or trough of Lake Erie. Professor Gilbert, known to all readers of current geological deductions concerning this region, attributes the singular turning of the Little St. Joseph and the St. Mary's rivers from their natural descent and direct course towards the west end of Lake Erie to this action. His theory states that far back in the glacial epoch, an immense mass of ice filled the west end of the lake to a great height and width. Its slow but resistless movement to the southwest marked and shaped the Maumee Valley. He supposes that the terminal moraines left on both sides by such a glacier forced the St. Joseph and the St. Mary's rivers into their southwestern and northwestern courses, respectively. The rivers met to form the Maumee.

Professor Newberry, chief geologist of Ohio, adopts this view, and in describing the southwestern outlet of the Great Lakes Basin, when the water stood at a higher level than now, says:

"A great river comparable with the Niagara flowed from it where Fort Wayne now stands, cutting a broad, deep valley through rock, sand, and gravel, and discharged into the Wabash. After flowing thus for ages, this river--which never had a name and which no man ever saw--ran dry and ceased to be, having been drawn to some other outlet."

Jesse L. Williams

FORT WAYNE GAZETTE, December 5, 1873

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